Air Force Historical Foundation
Annual Awards Banquet:
"The Balkans Air Campaigns and Their Influence Since 2001"
Thursday, 8 October 2009

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Air Force history, unlike that of our sister services, is relatively short. As an independent service, it spans only 62 years. Even now, we are just enjoying the wonder of a number of third-generation Air Force families. To quote one of our guests of honor, Mr. Wolk, regarding the 62 years: "That's not a long time. As historians look at it, it's a stitch in time."

Although some may say that we still have that "new plane smell," we have put many hours on the airframe, and have delivered tremendous, hard-fought results for our Nation; and, we continue to be indispensible to the success of our Joint team in today's operations. All the while, we have learned much from our previous efforts that have been so carefully recorded by our exceptional historians. While we often recall Edmund Burke's quote, "Those who don't know history are destined to repeat it," it certainly is still relevant, and thus prudent for us to consider. I would put a finer point on it: history, in *all* its aspects – good and bad – informs our efforts today. We seek to learn from our shortcomings, and to avoid them in the future; but, the storied history of the United States Air Force suggests that much of what we have done are things that we *do* want to repeat. The inspirational stories of vision and innovation in the early years of aviation, and of uncommon valor, tenacity, and grit in air power's initial application in combat, are now the stuff of legends – remarkable successes that we honor and, in fact, seek to emulate.

That is one reason the Air Force Historical Foundation is so vital today. We look to the past, not so much for documented lessons that deliver "no-fail" answers to today's challenges, but rather for faithful historical accounts – diligently studied and assembled by dedicated professionals like those in this room – to provide lessons that enlighten and inspire us for action in the present. Today, our Nation is locked in battle in two separate countries – Iraq and Afghanistan – and we seek wisdom wherever it may reside. Oftentimes, it

involves an examination of our rich heritage, as our Airmen stand shoulder-to-shoulder with our Joint teammates, and are committed to providing critical combat capabilities, wherever it is needed.

One such capability, which is informed particularly by our lessons from our campaign in the Balkans, is the persistent intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance that our Airmen and our unmanned aerial systems provide to the Joint team. Providing on-scene support 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and 365 days a year, in both Iraq and Afghanistan, our UAVs perform that critical ISR role and more – for example, precision strike, close air support, and combat search and rescue. This exponential demand for constant surveillance and support shows no signs of abating. One such system, the MQ-1 Predator, currently is flying 31 combat air patrols over both countries, and just recently logged over 600,000 flying hours, providing an unblinking eye over our ground forces. While this, by itself, is impressive, what is truly remarkable and informative to future trends is the accelerated rate at which we have accumulated these hours. It took 12 years – from 1995 to 2007 – for the Predator fleet to log its initial 250,000 hours. In two short years – from June 2007 to now – we logged our next 350,000 hours, and are on track to log the next quarter-million in just 13 months.

In historical context, we cannot overstate the importance of the Wright Brothers' watershed first flight, just over a hundred years ago, with which our current thrust in aviation has a clear nexus. As an instrument of war, the airborne platform is tied to its ability to gain the age-old advantage on the battlefield: the high ground. In World War I, airborne vehicles afforded the ultimate high ground, which at the time was unprecedented in *terra firma* warfare. Within two months of the war's beginning, the airplane proved its worth in two critical battles – the Battle of Tannenberg in August of 1914, and the First Battle of the Marne, one month later – providing vital intelligence and posing a threat, even if only perceived, to adversaries on the ground. General Foulois noted that, "It is the third-dimensional point of view of ground events that sets the airman apart from his earth-bound colleagues."

As an intelligence and reconnaissance platform, the aircraft continued to evolve in its capabilities. From U-2s, SR-71s, and even converted B-26s, we revolutionized a capability that was pure to air power's ISR roots. Today, our cutting-edge unmanned platforms, although technologically advanced, are effectively returning us to those salad days of air power.

The notion of unmanned or unpiloted vehicles, however, was not always so well-accepted. In fact, there was a time when some in our Air Force thought that missiles and other unmanned vehicles were not a good fit into our core mission, and thus had no place in our Service. Over 50 years ago, some Airmen were leery of the intercontinental ballistic missile. In the post-Vietnam era, even though, during the war, primitive UAVs provided valuable information from, and on, surface-to-missile sites and enemy airfields, funding for their further development did not survive the budgetary process. We began to regard UAVs as we do today, only as late as the war over Serbia, where they patrolled total exclusion zones such as Bosnian cities, and offered commanders real-time video imagery without the attending danger of aircrew loss. There, they were seen as an effective complement to ground-force systems. The General Atomics Predator (UAV-1) flew 15 missions – 12 of which were effective – and logged over 150 hours during Operation DELIBERATE FORCE. In an effort to better fuse the ISR capabilities of UAVs with various types of strike aircraft, some UAVs were used to enable prompt, precise, and effective attacks by A-10s and F-16s against highly mobile targets. As General Jumper would later explain, those who planned and executed the air effort learned that they had to make forward air controllers out of what previously were used only as intelligence collectors.

Indeed, history has taught us the importance of holding the high ground, and that air power offers us that strategic advantage. From our experience, we learned that better sensors were required for flights over 8,000 feet, and that there was a need for better integration of UAV and manned aircraft operations. It was from the operational missions over Kosovo that we learned the high

value of having UAVs integrate the intelligence-gathering loop directly into the targeting loop, both in the air and on the ground.

Technology and Visionaries

Those who are able to capture and embrace technology have a significant advantage over those who have not. At the end of World War II, our forebears were particularly adept at capturing the talents and ingenuity of scientists and engineers – Allied and German – to prepare our Nation for the future. Today, we reap the benefits of those visionaries. This is nothing new for the Air Force – a Service born of vision and innovation, and matured through incremental but steady progress, punctuated by invigorating periods of revolution.

We are at another one of those points of inflection. Now, it is clear that we must reconsider the relationship between people, machines, and the air. The technology that initially allowed us to slip "the surly bonds of Earth" has progressed to the point where pilots on the ground can now remotely operate highly capable, highly maneuverable, and highly versatile unmanned vehicles. Crews at Creech Air Force Base in Nevada, for example, plan, prepare, and execute Predator missions, and establish critical C2ISR links, in support of our forces half a world away. The Predator unmanned aircraft that they operate are equipped with television and infrared full-motion video cameras to track both stationary and mobile targets across a wide area. The aircraft are also armed with precision weapons, so that, when necessary, our crews can provide fire support and make those targets go away. From the on-board sensors, critical raw data is collected, and is sent to intelligence counterparts around the world, through our distributed ground systems, who process this data, fuse it with data from other sources, evaluate and turn this value-added information into actionable intelligence, and then disseminate it rapidly to commanders in the field. It is critical work; our best and bravest shooters on the ground rely on the surveillance capability that these Predators provide, to tell them what is around the corner, behind the wall, or on the roof. It truly is a game-changing capability.

Another valuable lesson – indeed, one of the most important – that we learned from the Balkans air campaigns is the criticality of precision munitions in today's operations. Technology has allowed us to reconsider our historical experience, in which we broadly targeted cities during World War II, began to appreciate precision weaponry during Vietnam, and armed 10 percent of our strike aircraft with precision munitions in DESERT STORM. With our experience in ALLIED FORCE, where over one-third of the weapons used by NATO forces were precision-guided, we can reshape our thinking. This technology has allowed us to consider using airborne firepower closer to non-combatant-inhabited areas, but it has also raised our expectations to reduce collateral damage. In Afghanistan, General McChrystal has correctly made the protection of the civilian population a top priority. On his orders, air-dropped munitions can be used only in very limited and prescribed circumstances. Meeting General McChrystal's intent is possible only through technological innovation, doctrinal advances, and the professionalism of our Airmen and our Joint teammates, in which I have the utmost confidence.

Conclusion

As we work toward a new strategy in Afghanistan, we face many unknowns. The decentralized nature of this country's governance requires that we take a tailored approach in each region, province, and village; but, with these challenges also come enormous opportunities. At a time when our Air Force is in transition, and is stepping forward to fulfill a wide variety of Joint mission areas, we are making history. From leading Provincial Reconstruction Teams, to coordinating life-saving close air support, to defusing roadside bombs and providing convoy security, to treating and evacuating wounded personnel – all, by the way, "outside the wire" and in the very thick of the fight – our Airmen are performing admirably, and are making tomorrow's history.

Today's Air Force is versatile and fully committed. Not every solution that we provide to the Joint team will necessarily have wings; and, when called to help, we will do everything possible, from our very substantial menu of unique

capabilities, to ensure that the Joint team prevails in conflict; for in the end, there is no victory for the United States Air Force alone. The only triumph that truly matters is the one that we garner with our Joint teammates, for the United States of America. Today's Air Force is adapting; and so, from the deserts around Kabul to the deserts around Las Vegas, we are making history, as we highlight the accomplishments of our UAV crews at Creech Air Force Base and elsewhere, and shift to a deliberately balanced mix of manned and unmanned capabilities.

General Possum Hansell once said to Mr. Wolk, "You know, this country was very fortunate in having the kind of leadership we had in World War II." I agree with that as a general proposition, but would add another fine point: Today's critical leadership is in the field – certainly not just in Washington – where steadfast and decisive leadership emerges from all levels, from the battlefield generals, to platoon and flight-level company grade officers, to our non-commissioned officers, as General Charles Krulak's notion of "the strategic corporal" accurately describes.

Our service men and women are the ones who drive mission success. When this chapter is written on their *undertaking*, I think that you will find many successes, as well as perhaps some shortfalls from which we can recalibrate our efforts; but, when you and others examine *them* and *their intent*, I am certain that you will find numerous accounts of valor, creativity, innovation, adaptability, and the most unwavering sort of devotion – that which we honor and celebrate yet again tonight. One of the most gratifying aspects of my job is to tell the story of our brave men and women in uniform who are serving today, under extraordinary circumstances. General Ryan, one of my esteemed predecessors, can attest to this, as he witnessed the same kind of dedication, and pondered the same sort of difficult issues, from the same unique vantage point. The history of his impeccable leadership informs my decisions, and inspires our efforts, as Suzie and I now serve our Air Force family.

Indeed, I think that the Air Force Historical Foundation and others will enjoy recording the achievements of this "next greatest generation." I commend you to our heroes' patriotism, dedication, and exceptional performance – and that of their families. They operate at great personal risk, and with enormous sacrifice, that attend to a life of humble service to our Nation.

I thank you for your hard work, and for the effort that you will put into faithfully recording all the lessons of their current endeavors. It has been a pleasure for Suzie and me to have shared this special time with you tonight. Thank you.